



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
June 23, 2009

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North Dakota Department of Health Investigates Third Food-Borne Illness Outbreak Associated With an Unlicensed Caterer

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is investigating a third food-borne illness outbreak associated with an unlicensed caterer, according to State Epidemiologist Kirby Kruger. The latest outbreak is connected with a wedding held Saturday, June 20, 2009, in McClusky, N.D.

The Department of Health has received reports of at least 15 people who became ill after attending a wedding dinner in McClusky catered by Aggie Jennings of rural McLean County. At least four people have sought medical care. The department has received no reports of hospitalizations at this time. People who are ill are reporting symptoms similar to that of salmonella infection, including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramping and fever.

People who attended the wedding and have become ill are encouraged to contact their health-care provider. In addition, they are asked to call the North Dakota Department of Health at 701.328.2378 or 800.472.2180.

Following the food-borne outbreaks reported last week, First District Health Unit, Minot, N.D., and the North Dakota Department of Health instructed Ms. Jennings not to cater any upcoming events until she had obtained a catering license. Today, First District sent Ms. Jennings a “cease-and-desist” letter ordering her to stop all catering activities.

The earlier food-borne outbreaks occurred after Ms. Jennings catered a wedding in Washburn, N.D., and a family reunion in Wilton, N.D., on June 13, 2009. More than 60 people became ill after those events, including 25 who sought medical care, nine who were hospitalized and two who were in intensive care.

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“With this third outbreak, the signs point to the caterer as the likely source,” Kruger said. “Preliminary laboratory tests indicate the strain of salmonella is the same as a strain commonly found in baby chicks. We have learned that there are chicks on Ms. Jennings’ farm, but we still need to investigate further to pinpoint the exact source of these illnesses.”

A food-borne illness investigation consists of interviewing people who are sick, conducting laboratory tests to determine what is causing the illnesses, and looking at food-handling procedures.

People get salmonella by ingesting the bacteria, usually through contaminated food or water. Salmonella also can be transmitted from animals and environmental surfaces that have been contaminated with human or animal waste. People who are at risk for severe complications or infection of the blood (sepsis) include young children, the elderly, and people who have existing health conditions that weaken their immune systems.

“It’s important for people to know that if they are hired to cook and provide food for events, they must be licensed,” said Kenan Bullinger, director of the Department of Health’s Division of Food and Lodging. “Anyone planning to hire a caterer for an upcoming event should ask to see his or her license or call their local public health unit or the state health department to verify licensure.”

For more information, contact Kirby Kruger, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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